

The morning after the komos before: hangovers in ancient Greece

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Drinking was an important feature of Greek culture and, although wine was regularly mixed with water (as much as five parts water to two parts wine), overindulgence in alcohol is well documented. Not only do we hear about riotous parties and individual drunkards in literature, but the vast majority of the painted pottery that survives was made for use at the male drinking party, the symposium. The scenes on symposium-ware quite often reflect the use of the particular vessel they decorate – satyrs tread grapes on a wine jar (amphora), women fetch water from the fountain on a water-jug (hydria) — and just occasionally the theme of overindulgence and its after-effects appears.

Introducing 'Ms Hangover'

One such reference to 'the morning after' can be seen on the wine-jug (oinochoe) pictured here, painted c. 430-25 B.c. All three of the characters in the scene have names inscribed beside them, which, along with the objects the characters are holding, tell a story. To the left is a satyr, identifiable by his horse's tail and pointed ears, holding a wine-jug in his right hand, just like the jug the scene is decorating; his name is Sikinnos, derived from *sikinis*, a dance performed by the chorus of satyrs in a satyr play. The centre of attention is the seated female figure, whose name makes sense of the whole picture: she is Kraipale, 'Hangover' personified. In her right hand she has a deep drinking cup (kantharos) of the type associated with the god of wine Dionysus himself, which she holds out as if for a refill from the satyr's wine-jug. In her left hand she is holding a thyrsus, the decorated staff carried by maenads celebrating the rites of Dionysus, which suggests she has been out on a Bacchic revel. The presence of Sikinnos, who also holds a thyrsus, suggests that the revel in question is the komos which was a central part of the City Dionysia, the festival during which satyr plays, as well as tragedies and comedies, were performed. Behind Hangover is a female figure labelled Thymedia, carrying a drinking cup which has steam rising from it (difficult to see in the photograph). Her name means something like 'Heart's Delight', which must be connected with what's in the cup – something hot, and presumably a restorative which will 'delight' the tired-looking Hangover. Nowhere else do we find a personified Kraipale, and her appearance on the jug is a humorous take on the convention of representing abstract ideas in female form. Kraipale appears to denote 'over-indulgence' as well its after-effects, and it is often difficult to distinguish between the two when translating. Liddell and Scott define the related verb *kraipalao* as to have a sick head-ache, consequent upon a debauch'. With such a definition it is no surprise to find references to *kraipale* in comedy. In Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1252-5) Prokleon responds to his son's suggestion that they should go on a drinking binge: 'No way. Drinking is bad. From wine comes door-smashing, assault and battery, and then a fine to pay through the hangover'.

A similar sentiment is voiced in a fragment by the fourth-century comic poet Alexis: 'If the hangover happened to us before the getting drunk, no one would ever allow himself more than a moderate amount of wine. But as it is, not foreseeing the punishment for our drunkenness, we quickly reach the point of drinking our wine neat'. Elsewhere the same poet is quoted as joking that wine-sellers sell their wine ready-diluted 'not in order to make a profit, but with forethought for the purchasers, so they may have healthy heads from their overindulgence'. Philosophers knew all about hangovers, too. At the beginning of Plato's

Symposium two of the assembled party declare themselves a little the worse for wear after the previous night's session-Pausanias is 'in a very bad way' and in need of a rest, while Aristophanes admits he was 'soaked'. The doctor Eryximachus supports their suggestion that tonight's drinking should be kept moderate: 'I think it is very clear from my medical experience that drunkenness is bad for people, and I would not myself be at all willing to drink deeply, nor would I advise anyone else to, especially when he is hung-over from the previous day'.

Curing hangovers

Eryximachus was not the only doctor to take an interest in the effects of overindulgence. Galen writes that 'all Greeks call headaches caused by wine "hangovers"... Some recover from their hangover during the next day, some during the night following that, and some not completely until the third day-this depends on the strength and quantity of the wine drunk and the constitution of the drinker'. An appealing cure, on the 'hair of the dog' principle, is suggested by a Hippocratic writer: 'If the headache is caused by a hangover, drink a half-pint measure of unmixed wine'. Unmixed wine seems also to be favoured by the author of the Aristotelian *Problems*, who spends some time speculating on the question 'why do those who drink their wine diluted have worse hangovers than those who drink it neat?' He also considers the fascinating question 'why does cabbage cure hangovers?' and there is other ancient evidence too in favour of cabbage as both a preventative and a cure, to be taken before indulgence as well as once the hangover has started. This is not entirely far-fetched – cabbage used to be a popular hangover remedy in Ireland, and carbonated cabbage juice is apparently the latest thing in commercial remedies available in Russia. It is just possible that boiled cabbage is the hot substance in Thymedia's cup on this jug-or perhaps heated neat wine, or an infusion of herbs. But whatever the favoured recipe, we should take the remedy as seriously as Hangover has been by our pot- painter. A collection of wine-cups found at the site of a tavern in Corinth bear inscriptions dedicating each to a particular god or goddess; one prudent drinker has dedicated his to Pausikraipale, the goddess 'Hangover Cure' herself.

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